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Developments in Indochina

ARMY REVIEW COMPLETED

Top Secret

20 January 1973



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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

CAMBODIA

Sihanouk consults with North Vietnamese on prospects for Cambodian negotiations.

LAOS

The Communists propose that the negotiations move into a secret phase

The

rightists are criticizing Souvanna's handling of the talks. Government troops are closing in on Sala Phou Khoun.

SOUTH VIETNAM

Military action is tapering off, except for heavy fighting in Quang Tri Province. The Communists have succeeded in closing some of the important roads in South Vietnam, particularly in the two northern military regions.

NORTH VIETNAM

Communist propaganda continues to tout the agreement as a military victory. Hanoi is starting to repair its electric power plants.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The logistic flow to South Vietnam includes more tanks.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Moscow says the Vietnam agreement will facilitate detente and ease international tensions.

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CAMBODIA

Sihanouk has publicly indicated interest for the first time in some sort of compromise solution for Cambodia Before leaving for a brief visit to Hanoi on 30 January, the former Cambodian leader told a French journalist in Peking that in the next few days he and his "government" are going to "reexamine their attitudes" and "analyze the situation" in the wake of the Vietnam cease-fire. Sihanouk stated that such political soul-searching was necessary because "our friends" -- an obvious reference to his Chinese backers -- had warned him that he risked being labeled a "warmonger" at a time when Lon Nol was launching a peace campaign. This admonition doubtless was offered by Chinese Premier Chou En-lai, who met with Sihanouk last weekend.

Despite this shift in attitude, Sihanouk again insisted that Lon Nol's removal is still a prerequisite for any possible settlement. He said that he had rejected US and French pressure for a tripartite conference on Cambodia involving his "government," Washington, and Phnom Penh. Sihanouk then repeated his line, which the Chinese have endorsed, that any political settlement in Cambodia will require bilateral talks between his "government" and the US. He showed skepticism about the prospects for such talks, however, citing his belief that the US would not abandon Lon Nol.

Although Sihanouk obviously is responsive to Peking's desire to see some progress toward a negotiated settlement of the tangled Cambodian problem, he apparently has some reservations about the willingness of Hanoi and the Communist-dominated Khmer insurgents to work toward the same end. Sihanouk said, for example, that the insurgents remain determined to bring down the Lon Nol government and that their attitude will prevail over his own re-examination of the situation.

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Sihanouk also seems to be anticipating difficulties in working out a common position with the North Vietnamese. He stated that if this "re-evaluation" were not concluded before the end of his visit to Hanoi, no joint communique would be issued. In addition to suggesting that he has his own problems with the North Vietnamese, Sihanouk's cautionary remarks could indicate a basic disagreement between Peking and Hanoi that would make progress toward a Cambodian settlement even more complicated and difficult.

The Military Situation

Military action remains unusually light in most sections of the country. Several minor Communist harassing attacks have been reported in the Phnom Penh area, and there has been an increase in Communist pressure against government defenses at Kompong Thom, some 100 miles north of the capital. Cambodian reinforcements have been moved by helicopter to Kompong Thom, and the situation there does not yet appear serious.

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LAOS

The Communists seem ready to get down to business on a settlement of the Lao conflict. After delivering a notably mild prepared statement at 30 January's session of the Vientiane talks, the Lao Communist delegation proposed that each side select representatives to meet secretly beginning on 31 January to work out a peace agreement. The semipublic weekly sessions would apparently also continue.

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The government delegation reportedly agreed in principle to the proposal for secret talks, but reserved a final reply until the afternoon of 31 January. Prime Minister Souvanna is in Bangkok on his way home from New Delhi and is not scheduled to return until 3 February. He has not commented on the Communist initiative, but in the past, he has indicated that real progress toward a settlement would probably require secret sessions.

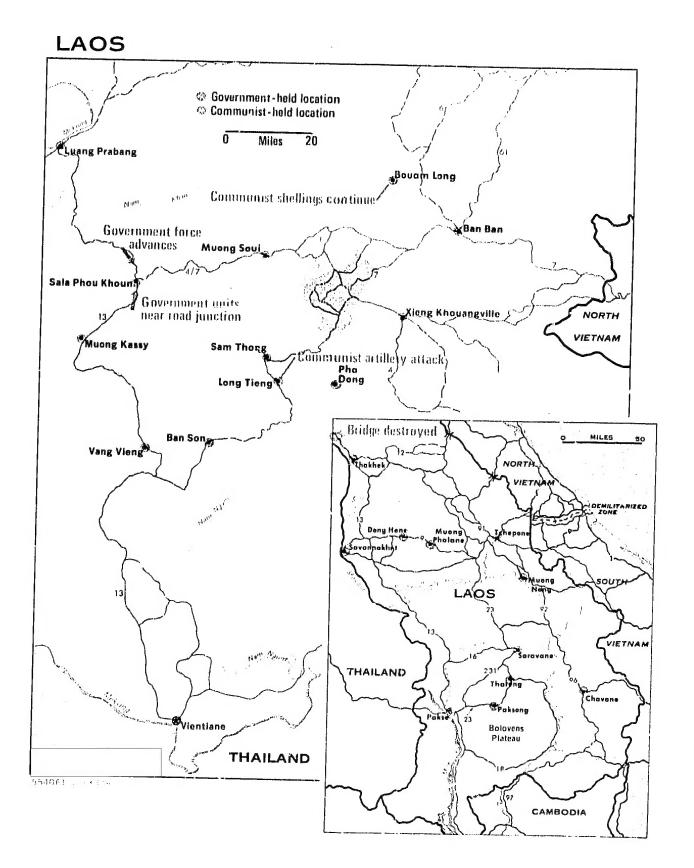
Both sides are attaching great significance to the new developments. Communist chief negotiator Phoune Sipraseuth called the session a "turning point in negotiations." Nevertheless, the forthcoming talks could be arduous. The two sides have not yet fully resolved major questions such as the shape and composition of a new provisional government and arrangements for the implementation and supervision of a cease-fire.

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Restive Rightist

Meanwhile, rightist elements in Vientiane--who long have voiced disapproval of any peace settlement

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that would bring the Lao Communists back into the government -- are becoming more critical of Souvanna's handling of the peace negotiations. One faction, led by members of the powerful Sananikone family in Vientiane, is openly maneuvering against the prime minister. These rightists reportedly have collected the required number of signatures on a petition calling for a special session of the National Assembly, where they hope to force some drastic cabinet changes. The King's almost certain refusal to grant a special session should forestall this particular maneuver, but Souvanna's worried supporters have nevertheless asked him to return to Laos promptly. The Prime Minister dealt successfully with a similar political challenge last summer and can be expected to move quickly to head off this potential threat to the negotiations.

The Military Situation

Government efforts to clear Route 13 south of Luang Prabang are continuing to be successful. Lao Army units from Muong Kassy were less than two miles south of Sala Phou Khoun on 30 January and should soon join the irregulars at the road junction. Army commanders have already dispatched a convoy from Muong Kassy to bring back weapons and supplies captured near Sala Phou Khoun. Another government force has pushed down Route 13 from the north to within six miles of the road junction.

Lao Communist units have apparently fallen back along Route 7.

Near the Plaine des Jarres, Communist artillery crews continue to bombard the government stronghold at Bouam Long and for the fourth straight day fired salvos into Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng.

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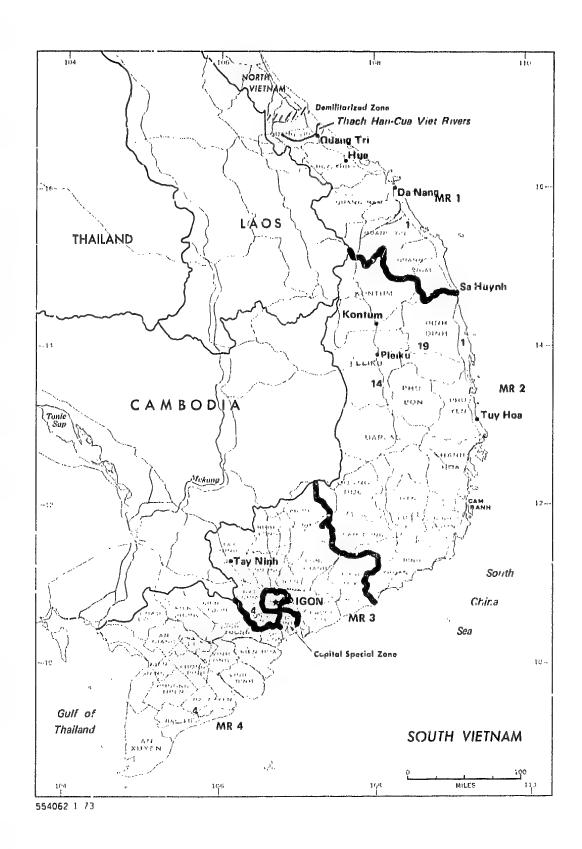
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In the south, Communist units destroyed a small bridge on Route 13 northwest of Thakhek and harassed Lao Army positions north and south of the town. Little fighting was reported at Muong Phalane, and the lull also continued around the Bolovens Plateau farther south.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Government and Communist military activity continues to taper off in most areas of the country, but sharp fighting has erupted in Quang Tri Province. The heaviest fighting is along the Cua Viet River, where Communist shellings and ground attacks on 30 January appear to have forced South Vietnamese Marines to abandon their foothold at the mouth of Enemy forces are also shelling governthe river. ment paratroop lines along the Thach Han River a few miles southwest of Quang Tri City, and some North Vietnamese troops are reportedly trying to cross the The South Vietnamese regional commander has told US military authorities that the Marines are taking heavy casualties and that the situation along the Thach Han is "tenuous."

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In the coastal provinces, sporadic clashes are continuing as enemy and government forces vie for control of scattered hamlets along Route 1. The Communists still hold isolated hamlets a few miles northwest of Hue, as well as near Da Nang. Farther south, the enemy reportedly holds several areas in Quang Ngai Province, including the village of Sa Huynh, and has raised flags in some districts, notably Mo Duc. Some fighting is occurring in northern Binh Dinh Province and, to the south in Phu Yen Province, the Communists are said

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to hold some hamlets close to the capital of Tuy Hoa. Nearly a score of hamlets in Binh Thuan Province have been recaptured, however.

The remainder of the country was marked by numerous but generally light activities. No significant fighting was reported in Tay Ninh City, and all roads and waterways throughout this region are reportedly open. In the delta, a high rate of Communist-initiated incidents continue, but no major fighting has developed.

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Road Interdiction

One of the objectives of the Communists in their cease-fire offensive was to disrupt traffic on South Vietnam's major highways and waterways. The Communists met with some success, but a number of the blocked roads have since been reopened by government troops.

The closing of roads running northwest from Saigon toward Tay Ninh City and northeast to Da Lat have hampered both South Vietnamese military operations and the transport of fresh foodstuffs. Shortages of fruit and vegetables have caused prices to rise in Saigon, but a late report states that all major roads in the 11 provinces surrounding the capital city are now open. No major highway in the delta provinces is currently blocked, although some traffic has been the target of sniper fire and other harassments.

The situation in the northern half of the country is much different. All major roads in South Vietnam's Military Region 2 are reported cut, many in several places. The resultant isolation of the highlands is causing some price rises and food shortages in Kontum City and similar problems may soon surface in the other main highlands capital of Pleiku. To the east, Route 1, the principal north-south highway which roughly parallels the coast line, is cut in many places south of Da Nang, with the greatest evidence of enemy success in southern Quang Ngai and northern Binh Dinh provinces.

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NORTH VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese Army daily weighed in on 28 January with the same sort of commentary on the Communists' military successes that had already appeared elsewhere in Hanoi media. Not surprisingly, Quan Doi Nhan Dan was even more positive than the earlier commentaries in its evaluation. "We have won," it states flatly at one point; "Our people have achieved the military exploit of the era." The paper follows the established line in discussing what the "victory" means in practical terms-an emphasis on the "struggle to build a stable and strong socialist North." Quan Doi Nhan Dan warns the Viet Cong, on the other hand, that they will continue to have "heavy burdens" and a "long road to cover, " perhaps implying there will be less help from the North. The paper made a special point of the party's key role in the Communist "triumph," and of the army's undying loyalty to the party line.

The Central Committee of the Fatherland Front, Hanoi's umbrella organization for a wide variety of political and social groups, was called into session on 29 January to celebrate the signing of the agreement and to hear from National Assembly President Truong Chinh about its duties in the new situation. Once again, Chinh's list of tasks emphasizes reconstruction and rehabilitation at home; although the northern people are urged to "unite with their southern compatriots," they are urged to do so in the context of "national concord."

Teneration for Le Duan

The day before Truong Chinh appeared at the Fatherland Front meeting, party First Secretary Le Duan visited a meeting in Hanoi of former residents of the Saigon area. Hanoi's domestic service reports

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that the meeting "heartily cheered" Le Duan and according to the radio's account, "listened attentively" to his address. Later a spokesman for the Saigonese "wished good health to the venerated and beloved Comrade Le Duan" and the rest of the party and government.

The nearly simultaneous appearance of Truong Chinh and Le Duan is in keeping with Hanoi's effort to emphasize the unity of the leadership, but the treatment of Le Duan is unusually adulatory. Veneration and love are emotions that are traditionally directed toward Ho Chi Minh, not toward any living North Vietnamese leaders. The coverage of these two appearances suggests that although Truong Chinh's position as the second-ranking member of the leadership is not in question, Le Duan's position is more solid than ever.

Industrial Reconstruction in North Vietnam

Hanoi's immediate industrial reconstruction priorities are beginning to take shape. Current efforts apparently are focused on the hard-hit electric power industry as Hanoi seeks to alleviate power shortages, the most serious constraint on industrial production. Five of ten damaged power plants in the Hanoi-Haiphong network are now in limited service, compared to two partially operational plants during much of December. Power supply has increased to about 35 percent of the country's pre-May generating capacity; only a 25-percent level was maintained during the last half of 1972. Most of this recovery probably was accomplished by salvaging equipment or cannibalizing workable components in damaged plants. There is little evidence of external repairs at any of the power plants.

Under the circumstances, Hanoi's initial emphasis is

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likely to be placed on restoring power supplies to undamaged manufacturing facilities before gearing up to a general reconstruction effort.

Reconstruction activity starts from a relatively low base. North Vietnam's account of economic achievements during 1972, presented in a series of radio broadcasts during 12-14 January by a member of the State Planning Committee, was subdued and no output figures were released. No mention was made of the modern sector of industry, which has been largely inactive since last May. Agricultural accomplishments were highlighted, with claims of a good spring harvest and with the autumn harvest depicted as ranking among the highest of the past 12 years. The latter claim is suspect, however. A Nhan Dan editorial published near the end of the autumn harvest admitted that the planted area in 1972 was "far smaller" than in the previous year because of necessary repairs to water-control facilities damaged in the 1971 floods. The editorial also admitted that crop yields had been curtailed by waterlogging last August and the persistent cold weather near the close of harvest. It appears that 1972 food production was comparable to output in 1970, a year considered normal.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Moscow is treating the signing of the Vietnam agreements as a major event that augurs well for the prospects for detente. On 28 January, Pravda published an editorial on the signing that reiterated an earlier statement by Politburo member Mazurov that the agreement opens up the prospects for easing international tension. Pravda hailed the Vietnamese for their "principled stand, combined with a constructive approach and flexibility" and was even more laudatory about the Soviet role in the Vietnamese "victory," noting specifically that the USSR had taken "all the necessary steps within the shortest space of time" to equip North Vietnam with "modern weapons, antiaircraft missiles, and artillery and fighter aircraft." Soviets also promised "continued support" for Vietnamese Communist efforts "steadily to implement the agreements for a peaceful democratic, independent and neutral South Vietnam."

Moscow is also indicating approval of the agreement by its formal actions. Suslov, the fourthranking politburo member, met North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Trinh at the airport on 30 January, and the Soviet troika has sent congratulatory messages to the North and South Vietnamese Communist leadership, emphasizing the victory theme, but also strongly endorsing the settlement as a basis for resolving outstanding problems and preserving the peace. On 30 January, the Soviets held a meeting in Moscow devoted to celebrating the signing. Half the Politburo attended, along with North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho. According to TASS, Tho also met with party leader Brezhnev to brief him on the last stages of the Paris talks. Brezhnev reportedly told Tho that the next task for all friends of Vietnam was to press "for precise and strict compliance with the

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he said, "is one of the most important prerequisites for the further relaxation of international tension and for the establishment of a lasting peace in Asia

and other parts of the world."

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